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ABSTRACT

To help students achieve a better understanding of narrative prose, yet still keep the benefits of semantic mapping, the traditional form of the semantic map is modified by incorporating the elements of story structure as part of the map. This format is called episodic mapping. Episodic mapping is based on the idea that most well-developed stories contain the same basic elements of structure. The five elements of episodic mapping include: setting, problem/goal, major episodes, theme, and resolution. This method helps children put story abstractions into the concrete, giving the children something more tangible with which to work. The visual nature of the episodic map also helps the children better understand the interrelatedness of the various parts of the story. This method has a lot of potential for the reading teacher who is trying to teach and encourage interest in narrative prose. It can also be used to reinforce or teach many of the specific skills necessary for reading comprehension. When practicing or assessing comprehension skills, classroom activities related to the following skills are especially useful: interpreting story events, drawing conclusions, finding the main idea or theme, sequencing events, comparing or contrasting, finding cause and effect, developing a sense of inference, and locating information. (One diagram is included.) (MG)

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Using Story Grammar to Teach Literature: Episodic Mapping

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Episodic Mapping: A Technique to Help Students Understand and Remember Stories

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Semantic mapping (Heimlich & Pittleman, 1986) is a well known and often applied reading technique. It is based on the idea that to better understand and remember a selection one should be able to relate how each of the ideas in a selection are connected to each other. It is referred to as "semantic" mapping because each of the ideas in the map are related semantically or meaningfully to each other.

Semantic mapping is an effective technique to help students understand and remember the content of expository prose, e.g., chapters or parts of a textbook that is designed to teach, but it is not as effective when reading narrative prose, e.g., short stories or novels. We believe the reason for this difference is that in a traditional semantic map the reader focuses on just one major idea. This major idea has a number of related sub-ideas. For example, a chapter in a textbook often has only one main topic but several subtopics that together develop it. On the other hand, in narrative prose, such as is found in a short story or a novel, the organizational pattern is different--based on the different purpose of the discourse. This difference in the form of narrative prose makes constructing a traditional semantic map much more difficult. This difficulty in construction reduces the major value of the semantic map by obfuscating the inherent organization of the prose.

Many reading experts have pointed out the importance of understanding the organizational pattern of what is being read. Knowledge of text structure helps the reader better remember the material (Mandler & Johnson, 1977), make predictions about which might occur next (Meyer & Rice, 1984, Thorndyke, 1977), as well as helping the student activate an appropriate Schema (Meyer & Rice, 1984).

To help students achieve a better understanding of narrative prose, yet still keep the benefits of semantic mapping, we decided to modify the traditional form of the semantic map by incorporating the elements of story structure as part of the map. We call this format **Episodic Mapping.** Episodic mapping is based on the idea that most well developed stories contain the same basic elements of structure. The structure that stories typically follow is called story grammar (Meyer & Rice, 1984).

While the grammars of individual stories may vary somewhat, in its most simple form, the structure of most stories focus around Setting, Plot, and Resolution. The following diagram shows our design for an episodic map.

The five elements in Episodic Mapping include:

Setting. The setting of a story introduces the main character(s). It also defines important background information which includes when and where the story takes place.

Problem/Goal. This section includes the problem or goal that the character(s) is trying to resolve or attain as a result of some initiating event that has set the story into motion.

Major Episodes. This section makes up the plot of the story: the attempts that the character(s) make to resolve the problem or reach their goal. In simple stories there may be only one episode, in more complex stories there may be several.

Theme. This section refers to the underlying idea of the story. It may be some kind of lesson or value that the main character(s) has learned as a result of his or her success or failure at attaining the goal or resolving the problem. The "theme", as we have defined it ties the events (episodes) in the story to some broader set of concerns, e.g., honesty is the best policy. Often the theme requires an inference on the part of the reader.

Resolution. The purpose of this section is to organize the conclusion of the story in order to answer the question, "How did the character(s) achieve or fail to achieve the goal or resolve the problem?"

Teaching Episodic Mapping

Step 1. Explain the purpose of episodic mapping. Its main purpose is to increase a readers' understanding of a story by understanding how it is organized. A second purpose is to encourage active participation through class discussion. Since each person's ideas about a story is valid everyone can contribute to a story's understanding.

Step 2. Explain each of the elements that make-up episodic mapping, i.e., setting, problem/goal, major episodes, theme, and resolution.

Step 3. Model how you mapped a story that everyone has read. While mapping the story try to explain why you mapped the story as you did. While your thinking may be different from some or even most of your students, the children will, through your modeling, get a "feel" for the kinds of thinking that should be doing.

Step 4. Read and map a story together. This takes a lot of discussion as well as give and take. It also gets everyone involved and thinking.

Step 5. Provide students with a story and a partially completed episodic map. Have the children complete it by themselves. After all of the students have completed it, develop, with the students, a "composite" map on the board, editing as necessary.

Step 6. Allow the students to map selections on their own

incorporating mapping into their normal repertoire of reading strategies.

We have found that students (grades 3 through 6, including a high school class of special education students) have been very responsive to episodic mapping. It is relatively easy to teach and learn and it encourages everyone's active participation. Indeed, the interest of students in reading narrative prose seems to have increased dramatically.

While "good" and "average" students enjoyed and learned from episodic mapping, we have found that the "low" achievers seem to have benefitted the most. We have been pleased to discover how much the low achieving youngsters have contributed to story discussions. Part of this excitement may be the newness of the activity; however, we believe that more importantly, the episodic mapping helped these low achieving children put story abstractions into the concrete, thus giving the children something more tangible to work with. The visual nature of the episodic map also seemed to help the children better understand the interrelatedness of the various parts of the story. We have been especially impressed with the inferential thinking that has gone on in our class discussions.

We think that episodic mapping has a lot of potential for the reading teacher who is trying to teach and encourage interest in narrative prose. While episodic mapping can be used to teach story grammar and the interrelationship of the parts of a story, it might also be used to reinforce or teach many of the specific skills necessary for reading comprehension including sequencing (the map helps the student "see" that stories flow in a predictable order); cause and effect (the characters' actions are effected by or may cause certain effects); and, predicting outcomes (understanding the structure of a story helps the reader predict what general actions **should** follow, and, an understanding of the details can encourage prediction of outcomes and conclusions).

Heimlich, J.E. & Pittleman, S.D. (1986). Semantic mapping: Classroom applications. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Mandler, J.M. & Johnson, M.S. (1977). Remembrance of things parsed: Story structure and recall. Cognitive Psychology, 9, 11-151.

Meyer, B.J. & Rice, G.E. (1984) The structure of text. In P.D. Pearson, et. al. (Eds.) Handbook of reading research, New York: Longman.

Thorndyke, P.W. (1977). Cognitive structures in comprehension and memory of narrative discourse. Cognitive Psychology, 9, 77-110.

Vacca, R.T. & Vacca, J.L. (1986). Content area reading, (2nd ed.). Boston: Little Brown. (See especially Chapter 2)

Classroom Applications of Episodic Mapping

Mapping activities can be used as postreading comprehension evaluation. After reading a selection, students complete a story map constructed by themselves or their teacher (Durkin, 1989 & Schmelzer, et.al., 1989). As the students fill in the parts to the map, they abstract information from the text, organize it, and put it into a format which can be more easily analyzed. Mapping strategies have been found to work especially well with the remedial or unmotivated reader because it is an active process. The students must play an active role as a decision maker in order to complete or construct the story map.

Episodic mapping and other related mapping types of activities are especially useful when practicing or assessing comprehension skills. These skills include (Au & Scheu, 1989; Armbruster, Anderson & Osterag, 1989; & Davis & McPherson, 1989): interpreting story events, drawing conclusions, finding the main idea or theme, sequencing events, comparing or contrasting, finding cause and effect, developing a sense of inference, as well as locating information.

Listed below are some examples of classroom activities which use episodic mapping as a base for the development or assessment of one or more of the above listed comprehension skills. These are suggestions of activities which can be initiated after the episodic map is completed.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

After the students have completed an episodic map of a reading selection, the teacher or the students can change one of the elements identified as part of the setting (characters, setting, time, or place). The students can then describe how this change effects the other elements of the story such as problem/goal, episodes, theme, or resolution.

SEQUENCING EVENTS

Although students may number the episodes as they occur in the story, a better understanding of how these episodes fit into a sequence of events may be developed by visually displaying them in picture or illustration form. Have the students develop a time line by placing story episodes as they appear in the story. These episodes may be drawn, written, or illustrated.

COMPARING OR CONTRASTING

Choose one of the elements of the episodic map such as: a character, the time, the place, the problem or goal, an episode, the theme, or a resolution. Have the students compare and contrast the chosen element to another from the story or to the students' own life experience. Have the students describe how the two elements are alike and how they are different.

LOCATING INFORMATION

Have the students create puppets to represent the characters in the story. As they develop their character puppets, ask them

to describe why they are using particular types of sizes, coloring, objects, or clothing. Ask the students to locate this information in the story to verify their decisions.

A similar type of activity may develop around the creation of a diorama of the setting of a story. Students may want to decorate a box or construct a simple representation of one of the scenes of a story. Again, students will be asked to locate information in the story to verify why they chose a particular type of scenery, object, color, or mood.

INFERENCE

After the students list the characters of a story, have each student choose one of the characters. The student will then be asked to complete an interest inventory for the character he/she chose from the story. Questions on this inventory would include information which must be inferred and not directly given in the text of the story. Such questions may include favorite or least favorite: foods, movies, books, rock group, friends, game, etc.

INTERPRETING STORY EVENTS

After completing the episodic map, have the students write their own summary of the story. This interpretation should be written in a risk free environment where the student is given the option of sharing his/her work with the teacher, other students, or no one.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

After completing the episodic map, ask the students to pretend that they are in a video rental store and their best friend just asked if he/she should rent the video of the story that had just been mapped. The students are to briefly describe the important points of the story and then make a recommendation to the friend about renting or not renting the video. The students will then be asked why they concluded to make a positive or negative recommendation.

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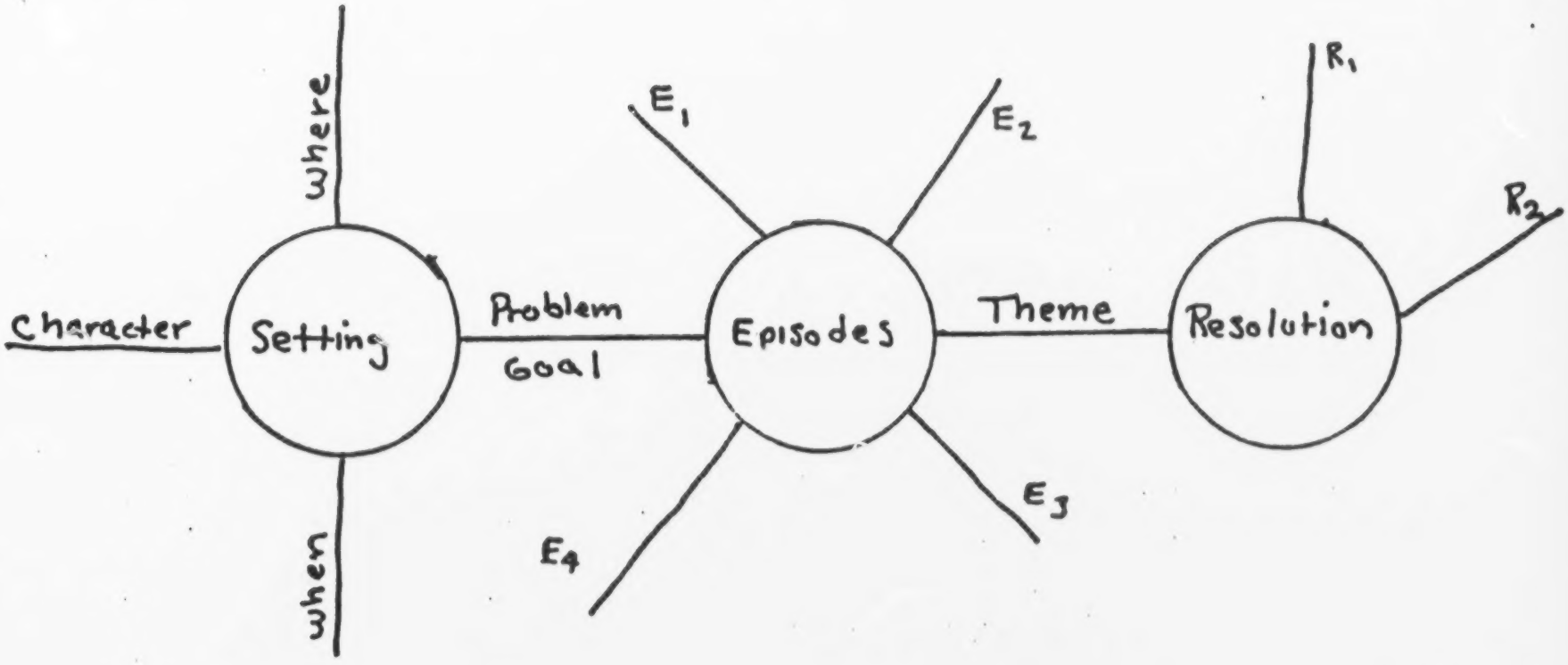
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